

*Arizona National Guard Family Readiness Program – FRG Basic Handbook*

TO: Unit Commanders, Family Readiness Group Leaders/Members, Military Points of Contact and Full-time Staff

No two Family Readiness Group (FRG) organizations look alike. A Military Police Unit FRG will not look like an Aviation FRG, an Armor FRG will not look like a Field Artillery FRG, and so forth. In addition, FRGs may not look the same due to their specific mission or the group dynamics of the members.

There are many variables in starting the organization and management of an FRG. We have developed this manual to assist you. It is intended to be a “How To” companion to Department of the Army Pamphlet 608-47, A GUIDE TO ESTABLISHING FAMILY READINESS GROUPS and Department of Emergency and Military Affairs (DEMA) Directive 600-12. Our intent is that you take the information we have provided and use it to suit your unit’s needs! Try it and mold it to fit your individual FRG. Make it fit so that it is uniquely yours. When you have done this, you will find your FRG becomes a combat Readiness multiplier – an asset.

Well trained/equipped soldiers and airmen who are able to perform their assigned mission to the best of their abilities PLUS well informed/resourced families capable of successfully sustaining periods of deployment of undetermined length EQUALS total unit mission success.

The specific reason for this handbook is to assist family members of the Army and Air National Guard Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). Not all questions will be answered; however, we have tried to answer the most obvious.

This handbook has been adapted and localized from the Department of the Army/Department of the Air Force regulations. For additional information on FRGs, call The Arizona National Guard Family Readiness Office at 602-267-2593 or 1-800-233-7758. Volunteers may also use the above numbers.

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**Family Readiness Group Basic Handbook**

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***Frequently Asked Questions***

**1. What is the purpose of this handbook?**

The purpose is to provide information on unit Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). It gives the goals of a FRG, provides instruction on how to organize a FRG, offers suggested activities, and explains what support the Army and Air National Guard can provide to a FRG. The FRG is a program for families and should be run by families. Membership and participation in a FRG are strictly voluntary. The information in this handbook is deliberately general in nature, rather than specific, to encourage your creativity and innovation.

**2. What is a FRG?**

A FRG is an officially sanctioned organization composed of family members of unit personnel. They provide information to and support each other during their association with the unit, especially during periods of separation, e.g., weekend drills, annual training, deployments, and/or mobilization. As an officially sanctioned program, a FRG will have the following elements:

- a. Guidelines that establish goals, scope, structure and responsibilities for the FRG as a mission-related family support program (see Appendix C for sample goals and objectives, see Appendix D for proposed organization, and see Appendix M for format of guidelines.).
- b. An official link to the chain of command, including a FRG Military Point of Contact (MPOC) appointed by the commander, to demonstrate active support for and approval of FRG activities (see Appendix I for proposed Job Description)
- c. A designated Chairperson, FRG representative whose volunteer services have been accepted by the commander (see Appendix F for proposed Job Description)
- d. A formalized and actively on-going communication and support network to link family members and the chain of command, for example, a telephone tree and/or FRG Newsletter. (See Appendix O for Telephone Tree format)

**3. What is a Family?**

A family is any individual that is interested in supporting the mission and vision of the Arizona National Guard. Family members are (both immediate and extended such as mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, etc.), volunteers and soldiers as well as others interested in the welfare of the service member i.e. fiancées, retirees, friends, etc.

#### **4. Why should we form a FRG?**

- a. Develop family support networks through families to mutually support each other.
- b. Provide a communication network between the unit, family members, and among family members.
- c. Improve family awareness of the organization of the military unit, its missions and activities.
- d. Develop activities that focus on improving the **quality of life** for the soldier/airman and family.
- e. Encourage participation of family members in activities that support the unit.
- f. Educate family members on the benefits and entitlements that are available to National Guard members and their families.
- g. Be prepared in the event of mobilization.
- h. Assure soldiers that their families will have support in their absence thereby enabling the soldiers to focus on the mission.

#### **5. Who are the members of a FRG?**

There are two types of FRG members:

- a. **Volunteers.** FRG volunteers are representatives or committee members responsible for a variety of FRG projects and activities. Volunteers may be spouses, children, parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters – any member of the family who is interested in supporting the unit. You may also want to consider inviting civilians and military retirees in the local area. Their knowledge and experience could be invaluable to your efforts, and many retirees would be happy to become “reconnected” to the military.
- b. **Program participants.** These are recipients of FRG services who, for example, attend classes, seminars, and social events sponsored by volunteers.

#### **6. Can membership in a FRG be mandatory?**

Absolutely not! Your group’s success depends on volunteers. There is no quicker way to turn off family members than to tell them they “must” participate. However, FRG volunteers must operate within the guidelines of the State Family Program.

#### **7. What if we don’t get everyone involved?**

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It is unrealistic to expect 100% participation. Some family members will want no part of a FRG. Some soldiers will want their families to have no part in it. You can only do your best to inform and make the information available. Successful FRGs are those that meet the unique needs of their soldiers and families.

### **8. What is the quickest way for FRGs to fail?**

There are two things that will guarantee failure:

- a. **Not having the approval and support of the unit commander.** Without command approval, you cannot function! (See Appendix N for a sample Memorandum of Approval.) Remember, the Memorandum of Approval will have to be reissued upon change of command or change of the Family Readiness Group Chairperson (FRGC).
- b. **Not having an official link to the chain of command.** The commander should appoint a FRGC to whom you can go for assistance and information. Much of the information for the newsletter and telephone tree (see Question 16d) will come from the FRGC. Obviously, this is a person with whom you'll want to establish a good working relationship. Remember that if the FRGC should leave the unit, another would be appointed immediately.

### **9. How do we begin?**

This may disappoint you: there is no single way to start a FRG. You may want to contact other spouses to determine their interest, or if your unit has an annual Christmas party or summer picnic that would be a good time to discuss it with others.

Another way is to go directly to the commander of the unit to express your interest and solicit his/her support. National Guard commanders are authorized to include families in information briefings. This would be a good way to bring families in and have the commander explain the FRG concept and ask for interested individuals to meet with him, or his representative, at a later time.

Another way to begin a FRG is to conduct an orientation briefing for "new" Guard families, benefits briefing, or a mobilization briefing for all family members.

You will just have to look at your own local situation, discuss it with your FRGC, and decide which is the best way to proceed. What works in one unit may not necessarily work in another. The Appendixes in this handbook have been sequenced specifically for the formation or reestablishment of a unit FSG.

### **10. How does a FRG determine its leadership?**

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That's your choice. You may have the commander appoint a chairperson, or you may wish to elect the leaders yourselves. In many cases, FRG leaders have simply come forward and volunteered their service. If you decide on an appointed chairperson, the commander may ask for a list of nominations (see Appendix J). In any case, the commander should officially confirm the leadership of the FRG (see Appendix M).

Whoever serves in whatever capacity should do it willingly. Don't try to force it on anyone. And above all, the leader does NOT have to be the commander's wife or the first sergeant's wife. The leader can be whoever emerges whether through election or appointment.

You may want to give some thought to continuity. If your leader's spouse is transferring to another unit soon, then the leader should "hand over the reins" well before leaving the unit. A FRG should not be personality driven, but should function smoothly through a change in leadership.

### **11. Should we elect officers for our FRG?**

Each FRG be governed by a Committee. This Committee is comprised of the overall FRG Chairperson, Co-Chairperson (if applicable), Secretary, Treasurer, and Military Point of Contact. These members may be elected or appointed to these positions.

### **12. What are the duties of the unit FRG Chairperson?**

The FRG Chairperson will call Committee meetings when needed and will work with all committee chairpersons to organize and implement family activities. The Chairperson should work closely with the unit commander, the FRGC and the State Family Readiness Coordinator (SFRC) to coordinate family activities.

The FRG Chairperson should send a brief report of each family activity to the State Family Readiness Coordinator (see Appendix F). This information is needed for the purpose of sharing ideas with other groups and publicizing programs.

### **13. Do we need by-laws?**

It is suggested - Most organizations are more effective when by-laws are established. (A sample of by-laws is included with this manual, see appendix E.)

### **14. Should the FRG keep minutes of meetings?**

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Yes. The FRG should have a recorder or secretary to keep minutes of all meetings. Keeping minutes will allow you to have a record of all FRG projects, decisions by the group, etc. The responsibilities of the recorder or secretary should also be noted in the FRG guidelines (see Appendix M and Secretary Job Description Appendix G).

**15. Do commanders and Family Readiness Group Chairpersons (FRGCs) have a responsibility to assist FRGs?**

Yes. Commanders and FRGCs have specific responsibilities concerning FRGs. In fact, all levels of military personnel have responsibilities toward FRGs. The specific responsibilities are outlined in National Guard Regulation (NGR) 600-12/Air National Guard Regulation (ANGR) 211-1, Chapter 1.

**16. What are some examples of FRG activities?**

FRG activities can be as varied as the number of members. This is where you're own good ideas and creativity can go to work. Your activities should match your group's makeup. Consider the average age, background, and interest of your group. An activity that was a huge success in one area may very well bomb in another.

Activity a. through d. that follows is generally considered to be critical to the success of a FRG.

**a. Outreach.** You probably have families in the unit who has had no contact with the unit and have little or no knowledge of the National Guard. You should establish an outreach program to make contact with as many families as possible. Letter, phone call, or personal visit can do this. Your unit can help you get information on the soldiers and their families. You are authorized to use the unit's telephone for the purpose of contacting other families with information about the FRG.

**b. Sponsorship.** New soldiers periodically join the unit and, by regulation, are supposed to be formally sponsored by a member of the unit. The sponsor helps the new soldier get to the first drill, meet other soldiers, and receive information about the unit's mission. But the family is often overlooked. Members of the FRG can help sponsor new families. This is very similar to the Welcome Wagon program you may be familiar with in your civilian community. Your sponsorship program need not be elaborate. It may be a phone call, a letter, or a visit. Through whatever means, express a warm welcome. And, of course, this is an excellent way to recruit new volunteers for the FRG.

**c. Command Letter/FRG Newsletter.** Your group may be scattered throughout the state making it difficult for some members to attend meetings regularly. But everyone will want to keep up with what's happening in the unit. A command letter is the best way to keep people



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informed as well as involved. You can use official mail to send newsletters to the family at the home address (see Question 21). If your unit simply cannot afford the mail costs, you may want to raise funds for this purpose (see Question 28).

Your command letter or newsletter must contain official information as determined by the Commander. Some examples are: upcoming training events and dates; benefits and entitlements briefings; legislation affecting the National Guard; news of the unit such as changes of Command; or announcements of FRG activities. Many FRG newsletters have feature sections such as “News from the Commander” or “The Chaplain’s Corner” section that contains news of promotions, graduations, awards, etc.

**d. Telephone tree.** A telephone tree is a system through which you can quickly get information out to your group. It can be activated during an emergency, during annual training, or during Federal or State mobilization. A telephone tree serves as your rumor control – your members learn to disregard rumors and rely on the information that comes through the telephone tree (see sample format Appendix O).

A telephone tree works like this – the group leader receives accurate information from the unit FRGC and then calls two to three other designated people. Those people are then responsible for calling three or four others, and so on until everyone in the unit has been contacted. You may want to consider establishing a telephone tree based on geographical location so that long distance calls are kept to a minimum.

You’ll want to be sure to tell the committee to get an alternate phone number for the people they’re responsible for calling such as a work number, their parent’s number, a neighbor’s number, etc.

**e. Educational Activities.** Soldiers receive all sorts of training for their military jobs, but spouses generally receive little or no information concerning their “mission.” Various members of the chain of command will be willing to present classes to your FRG on subjects that you really need to know about. A few examples are (1) mission of the unit; (2) preparing for mobilization; (3) benefits and entitlements; (4) the Survivor Benefit Plan; and (5) the Army or Air Force in general.

If you happen to live near a military installation, ask the Family Services Center or the Personnel Office to give classes. You can also ask local “helping” agencies such as the Armed Forces YMCA, American Red Cross, and county and state agencies. If you are not near a military installation, then it is important that you contact your local agencies because they will be the ones who will assist in the event of an emergency.

Do not forget the fun classes – crafts, decorating, fashion shows, etc. This is when you really want to remember the ages of your participants. We all have different interests at different stages in our lives.

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f. **Employer Support.** We cannot stress enough the importance of employer support of the Guard. Any soldier who has had to ask for extra time off can vouch for that. Help the unit sponsor “boss” night, or encourage individual members to invite the boss for dinner or some similar activity. Invite employers to unit celebration activities. Let the employer see that the family supports the unit. Sponsor an Employer Award Program, and be sure you get local newspaper coverage – a little free publicity for the employers – they’ll love it.

g. **Volunteer Recognition.** The success of a really good FRG will depend on the time and effort of dedicated volunteers. It can’t happen any other way. But volunteers will not go on indefinitely without recognition for their efforts. Recognition can be in many forms from a simple “thank you” or “good job”, to formal awards presented by the commander in the presence of their soldiers and family members. You can also consider a letter of commendation from the commander and/or FRGC. You and the unit FAO can devise a unit award (B Company “FRG Achievement” Award, FRG Volunteer of the Quarter). This takes time and patience but is well worth it. This is another activity that deserves local newspaper coverage. Let the civilian community know of the good works of your volunteers.

h. **Social Activities.** Never, ever underestimate the value of social activities (the Christmas Party, summer picnic, Halloween Party, spring fling, etc.). This is where real bonding between group members takes place. Plan as many events as your group can handle.

**17. What committees should function as a part of the FRG?**

a. **Family Welcoming Committee.** This committee will make contact with family members and implement outreach and sponsorship programs for the FRG (see question 16 a and b). This committee should work closely with the unit FRGC and local recruiters to obtain necessary information about new members. Many Welcoming Committees find it helpful to make up “Welcome Packets” which contain information concerning the mission of the Guard, benefits, mobilization and the Family Program to give to new family members. (See question 27 for materials available from the SFPC.)

b. **Educational Activity Committee.** This committee should coordinate and arrange for activities which address specific needs of families and quality of life issues, i.e., benefit briefings, mobilization readiness briefings, budgeting and financial management classes, drug abuse workshops, stress management workshops, CPR classes, etc. (see question 16e). Many FRGs have composed a brief questionnaire for family members too complete in order to determine what briefings or issues are important to family members. Whatever you do, it is important to meet the educational needs of your individual members.

This committee should work closely with the MPOC for the use of the military facilities and National Guard resources.

c. **Social Activity Committee.** This committee will coordinate and arrange for family activities such as Open House, Family Days, picnics, sporting events, banquets, etc. which will

increase fellowship and a feeling of camaraderie among family members (see question 16f and 1).

**d. Public Relations Committee.** This committee will assist in obtaining publicity (pictures, articles, etc.) for the National Guard unit and the Family Program, both in military and civilian publications. The committee will work closely with the local FRGC to clear all publicity before releasing information to the public. This committee should edit and publish a newsletter which will be sent to families of Guard members and will include articles of interest to families as well as schedules of events, etc. (see question 16c). This committee will work closely with the local FRGC to duplicate and mail letters directly to family members. This committee can also assist the unit in sponsoring employer support programs (see question 16g).

**e. Telephone Tree Committee.** This committee should develop a telephone tree which will reach families quickly in case of emergency, times of family crisis, etc. (see question 16d). The telephone tree should be “closed looped.” That is, when the last person receives the information, they should call the chairperson to let them know that the information has been given to all members. Committee members should always strive to report the “facts” and not repeat rumors (see sample format Appendix O).

**f. Other Committees.** Your FRG may want to establish other committees, such as a Fund Raising Committee, etc. The needs of your group should determine other committees, which are necessary.

**18. Is there any specific format for a FRG command letter/newsletter?**

No. You and your editor may have to experiment before you find a format that you’re comfortable with.

**19. How often should we publish a command letter/newsletter?**

No single answer here. Whatever suits your need. That may be quarterly, semi-annually, by monthly, or as needed. (Or as often as you can afford the mailing cost!) Let’s face it – it may be tough to come up with hard news on a rigid, fixed schedule. Experiment. Don’t decide right away. See what works best through trial and error.

**20. Should the FRG meet on a regular basis?**

See answer to Question 19. Whatever meets your local need.

**21. Can we use official mail to send FRG command letters?**

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FRGs are authorized to use official mail to send consolidated information packets to the soldier's home address. These mailings must support the commander's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs. Commanders are the approval authority for the use of official mail within their command. Commanders should be encouraged to make a favorable decision on the use of official mail to support their morale, welfare and recreation programs. The use of official mail by FRGs is a privilege, not a right.

### **22. To whom should FRG command letters/newsletters be addressed?**

FRG communications should be addressed to the family member at home whenever possible. FRG newsletters have a tendency to "get lost" or forgotten when given to or mailed to the Guard member.

### **23. Can we get names, addresses and telephone numbers of family members?**

Unit rosters may be released to FRGs. Membership in the FRG is voluntary. Names, home addresses and home telephone numbers can be collected from the unit; however, participation is completely voluntary. **Only authorized personnel may be use this information and this information can not be released to private organization. USE EXTERME CARE WITH THIS INFORMATION, YOU COULD BE FINED FOR MISUSE.** This information is protected by the Privacy Act and will not be released without the service member's consent.

Once information is collected from the Guard member or family member and a FRG roster is compiled, this information must only be used for the purpose for which it was requested, i.e., FRG newsletters, telephone trees, etc. It cannot be used for other purposes, nor can it be transferred or loaned to another group or activity. The family members who use this information must be sensitive to the need to maintain the confidentiality of this information.

### **24. What support is the Army and Air Force authorized to provide to the FRG?**

Once your FRG is approved and recognized as an official command program, the Army and Air Force is authorized to provide you and your volunteers a variety of support. Please note the word **authorized** – the unit is authorized to provide the below listed support when it is available. This does not mean the commander must provide all these things.

Office space, to include desk and office supplies, use of the Armory for FRG activities and functions, access to official telephone lines.

Use of National Guard mailing privileges for official correspondence, newsletters, activity flyers, and welcome packets.

Invitational Travel Orders (ITOs) for official trips to consult with family members or reserve/active duty personnel on FRG business.

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Use of official vehicles, if available.

Bus support, if available.

Materials and handouts for family members such as Mobilization Handbooks, Benefit Guides, etc.

Certificates of recognition and plaques to recognize outstanding volunteer service.

### **25. How can the FRG request to use a bus for an activity?**

Military buses may be used to support authorized unit FRG activities. Requests to use buses will be in writing from the unit commander supporting a FRG activity and forwarded through command channels to the major subordinate command controlling the buses. Use of buses by FRGs will not interfere with unit training nor cause undue strain on command budgets. Major subordinate commanders will approve use of buses based on availability.

### **26. For what purposes can ITOs be issued for FRG Volunteers?**

ITOs can be issued for FRG volunteers to attend job-related conferences, seminars, or symposiums for the purpose of conferring or consulting with other military volunteers or volunteer supervisors, and/or civilian volunteers, Department of the Army and/or Department of Defense and/or Department of the Air Force officials.

### **27. What support is available from the State Family Program Office?**

Although the State Family Program office cannot provide cash money to FRGs, it can provide:

- a. Informational materials such as Mobilization Handbooks, Benefit Guides, Sample Guidelines, are available.
- b. Volunteer awards/recognition programs.
- c. Training opportunities for volunteers.
- d. Promotional items, when available, such as pens, pencils, Frisbees, balloons, calendars, and bumper stickers, etc.
- e. If your FRG has a particular need check with FRGC or the SFPC to determine if it can be provided. Also, the SFPC welcomes your suggestions as to desired promotional items, as well as informational materials and other needs.

**28. Can we raise funds?**

Family members may participate in fund-raising activities as long as accounting procedures are established. This can be done through the establishment of an informal or private fund at a local bank. See the Treasurers Handbook for additional information.

In establishing an informal or private fund, you must ensure that your fund's net worth does not exceed \$1,000 at any one time, and that a fund custodian or treasurer is appointed or elected to balance and account for the funds. Your treasurer must, on an annual basis, provide the group leader and the commander a financial status on the account. This is all that is required.

FRGs should not seek to become a private or non-profit organization in order to avoid the \$1,000 limit. A private or non-profit organization and a FRG are not one and the same because an approved FRG cannot be a private organization. A FRG operates under the guidance and direction of the National Guard and is authorized support from the Army and Air Force as outlined in question 24. Private or non-profit organizations cannot receive support from the Army or Air Force.

Although FRGs may raise funds, please remember that the focus of FRGs is to provide information and a network of communication to family members. FRGs should not focus on fund-raising as a primary activity. When your FRG wants to sponsor a specific project, which will cost money, raise the funds necessary and then spend them for that project.

Your FRG should not continuously ask members to raise funds by selling, donating, etc. When fund-raising activities are conducted too often, many people will lose interest in the group's activities.

**29. How can we open an account at a bank without a tax ID number for our group?**

Banks are not required to have either a tax ID number or a social security number on a non-interest bearing account. When opening an account you should take with you either the minutes of the FRG meeting where you were selected as treasurer or the Memorandum for Accepting Volunteer Service, signed by the commander.

**30. Who decides how we spend money that the FRG makes in fund-raising?**

One or two people should not have the sole authority to spend FRG funds. When money is spent for a specific project or function, the entire FRG should share in the decision-making process. For small incidental expenses, your FRG may want to give authority to the Steering Committee to approve such expenditures. Policies governing FRG funds should be outlined in the unit's FRG by-laws (see Appendix E).

**31. May we sell food items at the armory on drill weekends as a fund-raiser?**

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FRG activities (selling of food items) may be held in conjunction with a unit's weekend drill as long as they do not interfere with the unit's mission and individual training.

In order to ensure that we maintain a workable Guard/Family relationship, certain guidelines have been established.

**a. Activity must be included on the unit's training schedule.** You should coordinate these activities with your FRGC.

**b. Exclusively, FRG volunteers and not unit personnel must operate activities.**

**c. At no time will food items, i.e., homemade cakes, pies, etc. be served with authorized government furnished meals.** This especially applies to the holiday meal. Additional allowance is authorized for procurement of the holiday meal to include family members and guests. The unit may request this additional allowance from the United States Property and Fiscal Office (USPFO).

**32. May our FRG donate or loan funds to families who are experiencing financial difficulty, especially during deployment of the National Guard members?**

Although it is permissible to give FRG funds to families experiencing financial difficulty, this practice is discouraged. Many conflicts within the group may surface unless funds are distributed equally. Often it is difficult to determine who is needy and who isn't, and you will almost always receive criticism.

It would be much more desirable for FRGs to serve in a referring role and refer needy families to agencies such as the Red Cross, American Legion, etc.

All Family Readiness Group Chairpersons (FRGCs) should have a copy of a Resource Directory of "helping" agencies for their particular county. FRGCs and members of the FRG should become familiar with these resources in order to refer families when different needs arise.

This is not to say that your FRG could not make a donation when, for example, a family loses a home by fire, or there is a death in the family. However, your FRG operating procedures or guidelines should, in detail, state under what circumstance funds would be used in this manner.

**33. Could my FRG volunteer experience be beneficial to me when seeking paid employment?**

As a FRG volunteer you will have some very rewarding and challenging experiences, as well as experiences that may make you want to pull your hair out. You will have the opportunity to develop leadership qualities and to attend training seminars and workshops. You may find

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yourself in charge of the group's funds and learn accounting skills. Some of you may become very effective at public speaking – you may even find yourself being interviewed by a radio or TV personality. The possibilities are almost endless.

The skills that you acquire, as a volunteer will enhance your chances for a future job in the “real” world. Employers are looking for people who are self-motivated, willing to get involved and good team players. If you decide at some point to fill out an application for employment, do not forget to mention your volunteer experience! It just may be that your volunteer experience will land you that job you want.

## **What is A Family Readiness Group?**

A Family Readiness Group (FRG) is an organization of family members (both immediate and extended such as mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, etc.), volunteers and soldiers as well as others interested in the welfare of the service member (i.e. fiancées, retirees, friends, etc). The FRG provides an avenue of mutual support, assistance and a network of communication among family members, the chain of command and community resources.



**A Family Readiness Group IS NOT!!!**

- *Babysitters*
- *Community Taxi Service*
- *Financial Institutions*
- *Professional Counseling Service*

***Leaders have two important characteristics:***

*First, they are going somewhere;*

*Second, they are able to persuade others to go with them.*

**Purpose Of the Family Readiness Group**

What is the purpose of a Family Readiness Group (FRG)? The *primary purpose of any FRG is to encourage self-sufficiency among its members by providing information, referral assistance, and mutual support.*

**Family Readiness Groups do not encourage or foster DEPENDENCY!!!!**

Common Goals for an FRG may include:

- Welcoming new families
- Developing and providing copies of telephone trees to all families
- Assisting family members in the focusing & understanding of unit mission
- Providing social and emotional support
- Sponsoring briefings throughout the deployment/mobilization process
- Providing information and referring to appropriate agencies

**Remember: Resource Your Families, Don't Rescue Them!**

***“You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could, and should do for themselves”***

-Abraham Lincoln

**Family Readiness Group Roles and Responsibilities (See Appendix C)**

The Commander is responsible for establishing the FRG, however, a FRG must be owned by its' members. The Commander, Chaplain, Executive Officer (XO), Adjutant (S-1), First Sergeant (1SG), and Sergeant Major (SGM)), should serve only in an advisory or resource capacity. This will facilitate the FRG's ability to act on their own behalf during periods of deployment/mobilization.

Many roles exist within a FRG structure. The following may be used as guidelines:

**a. Commander:**

- Appoint FRG Leader in writing. Use a democratic process for elections of a Family Readiness Group Leader. Make the election open to all or you may be inviting a problem. Invite all family members and friends in the unit to participate with a letter (Appendix A), job descriptions (Appendix F-I), and a nomination form (Appendix J). Send information to the family members and friends and include a return self-addressed stamped envelope. Announce the meeting to your soldiers/airmen in formation. Use your chain of command to get the word out. Insist that all your leaders support the Family Readiness Program in your unit. If you allow their complacency, your families will suffer. You should also develop a phone roster for unit member points of contact and invite them, by name, to your organizational meeting. It is most effective to follow-up with a phone call. Many people have good intentions but then forget the meeting.
- Establish unit level FRG.
- Ensure FRG leader is trained.
- Publicly support the FRG. Address your soldiers/airmen in formation. Tell them you expect them to take care of their families by keeping them informed for deployment and inviting them to take part in unit activities.
- Communicate regularly with FRG leader.
- Ensure FRG Leader has access to necessary equipment, facilities, and supplies to do the job you have asked them to do.
  
- Ensure FRG activities are not contrary to unit interest.
- Review FRG records monthly.
- Ensure FRG Leaders and volunteers receive recognition for their contributions.
- Term of office should be as established by unit FRG by-laws.

**b. Volunteer Advisor:**

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This volunteer may be your most experienced volunteer. Its important the volunteer is willing to help all Family Readiness Group leadership in the command.

**Spouses do not have rank.** Spouse's chain of communication generally follows the same chain of command established by the military. On the family member side of the house, this is often referred to as the "Chain of Concern." A senior spouse may be present at all command levels, but particularly the State, Major Command/Wing and Battalion level.

**The Senior Spouse Advisor duties may include:**

- Provide communication network between the command, FRG, and the families.
- Identify common problems, concerns and issues and make recommendations to the appropriate level of command.
- Promote and support training of volunteers at all levels of command.
- Serve in an "advisory" capacity.
- Participate and offer assistance as needed and upon request.

**c. FRG Leader: Chairperson (s)**

The leader(s) can be any family member or friend of the unit whom the commander has endorsed and appointed. Getting leadership is half the battle. Commanders often force the issue on to their own spouses. This can be a large mistake. It is true that your spouse would be expected to be involved, but don't force the issue. On the other hand, spouses of commanders, first sergeants, and senior leaders should not feel they are to be placed in charge. Remember that it is the military member who earned the rank, not the spouse. Be aware of this double-edged sword.

**Use EXISTING FRG structure - DON'T reinvent the wheel.**

**The FRG Leader responsibilities may include:**

- Become knowledgeable of unit mission, existing FRG operating procedures, structure and community resources
- Organize unit level Readiness group
- Obtain name, addresses, phone numbers, and E-mail addresses (if they have them) of all family members which may include extended family members of single soldiers

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- Attend and chair Family Readiness Group meetings
- Recruit, train, and manage volunteers using community resources as needed
- Ensure communication is maintained among members
- Call Key Contact personnel to activate phone tree
- Coordinate with community resources to provide training for FRG members
- Identify family member concerns and relate to unit leadership
- Work in conjunction with unit leadership to minimize rumors and stress
- Maintain communication with Commander and/or Unit Family Readiness Military Point of Contact

**d. Key Contact Person: Designated telephone contact volunteer**

- Responsible for calling assigned FRG members
- Maintain up-to-date names, addresses and telephone numbers for assigned FRG members
- Provide timely and accurate information to family members
- Ensure contact is maintained
- Provide information and referral assistance to family members as needed
- Ensure accessibility for information and referral assistance
- Work in conjunction with company leadership to minimize rumors and stress
- Identify assigned FRG members concerns and relate to FRG leader
- Attend Family Readiness Group meetings

**e. Treasurer: Serves as the fund custodian for the Family Readiness Group**

- ❖ Keep accurate records of FRG funds
- ❖ Arrange for regular and change of custodian audits
- ❖ Attend FRG meetings
- ❖ Provide regular reports to the commander
- ❖ Provide timely and accurate financial reports

**f. Family Readiness Group Member:**

- ❑ Update addresses and telephone numbers
- ❑ Fulfill any accepted responsibilities
- ❑ Stay informed
- ❑ Attend and participate in FRG activities

**g. Family Assistance Center NCOIC (Applies to Army Only)**

Primary point of contact for family members who have questions or need support

during the mobilization/deployment process.

**Duties Include:**

- ◆ Link between FRG and deployed unit
- ◆ Link between the FRG and military resources
- ◆ Upon deployment, becomes POC for official actions

## **Getting Started**

**As the newly appointed FRG leader, you must discuss the following with the Commander:**

- ➔ Command policy and philosophy on FRG
- ➔ Type of FRG (formal/informal) and current structure
- ➔ Frequency of meeting with Commander
- ➔ Resources (i.e. access to alpha roster, use of government facilities, funds and reimbursable expenses, office space with desk and chair, access to copy machine, mailing/postage, telephone with on/off post lines, fax machine, supplies, access to typewriters/computers, access to e-mail and transportation readiness)

**Plan your first meeting:**

**• *Assess potential FRG population:***

- + Obtain and review alpha/alert rosters (available from unit adjutant or unit liaison)
- + Develop and use survey sheet (sample in forms section)
- + Obtain and maintain unit family information sheet (See Appendix B)
- + Determine optimal meeting day, time and location

**• *Identify resources required:***

- + Child Care (see child care section)
- + Meeting location to include seating (i.e. chapel, unit day room, local spouse club building/center, unit classroom, drill site, community center, school multi-purpose room, youth activity center, dining facility, etc.)
- + Refreshments
- + Set up and clean up
- + Transportation
- + Readiness staff for first meeting

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**• *Determine best method for marketing FRG meeting:***

- Personal contacts via telephone
- Personalized invitations (mailed to family members)
- Unit newsletters
- Flyers (attach to Leave and Earnings Statement [LES])
- Installation/community newspaper
- Radio/television, public service announcements (this is a free service)
- Electronic marquees/bulletin boards
- e-mail

**• *Develop the meeting agenda. Agenda topics may include:***

- + Welcome and sign-in (table with name tags)
- + Introductions/icebreakers
- + Group Norms:
  - \* Confidentially
  - \* Everyone is equal regardless of sponsor's rank
  - \* Respect ideas of others
  - \* Stay on track and avoid war stories
- + Mission of unit (brief description)
- + Purpose and role of FRG (brief description)
- + Complete or update family information sheet (See Appendix A)
- + Units/FRG information (i.e. unit training schedule, upcoming events/inspections, hail and farewells, annual training, etc.)
- + Ways to disseminate information
  - \* Telephone trees (notification system)
  - \* Newsletters
- + Plans for the future
  - \* Volunteer recruitment
  - \* Determine type of FRG (formal/informal)
  - \* Fund raising, if local policy permits (booths, fairs, car washes, bake sales, silent auctions, cookbooks, bingo, etc.)
  - \* Activities (i.e. picnics, holiday parties, outings, guest speakers, mobilization training for families, etc.)
  - \* Determine future meeting dates and time
  - \* Family member training
- + Questions/answers
- + General discussion
- + Adjourn (social and refreshment time)

## **Family Readiness Group Participation**

### **Helpful Hints for First Meeting:**

- ☒ Start/End on Time
- ☒ Stick to the Agenda
- ☒ Avoid Cliques
- ☒ AVOID MENTIONING AND USING RANK

***Family Readiness Group Leaders are like Maytag Repairmen, nobody calls you until something is broke!!!!***

### **Membership:**

Family Readiness Group membership is open to unit family members (immediate and extended such as mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, etc.) as well as others interested in the welfare of soldiers such as finances', retirees, etc.

### **Encouraging Participation:**

- ◆ Survey family members to determine needs, interests and frequency of meetings. (See Appendix C)
- ◆ Offer practical activities
- ◆ Communicate with newcomers soon after their arrival; offer transportation to the first meeting
- ◆ Make meetings brief and enjoyable
- ◆ Provide childcare and/or child activities when possible
- ◆ Do not feed rumors. (Although not possible to eliminate rumors, they can be curtailed)
- ◆ Present positive images and encourage full participation
- ◆ Ensure FRGs provided timely and accurate information and is NOT received as a rumor mill

## **Family Readiness Group Funding**

**MONEY CAN BE ONE OF THE TOUGHEST ISSUES YOU WILL CONFRONT!!!**

### **FACTS:**

- Unit Commander is ultimately responsible and should audit FRG books once a year and/or at change of custodian.
- There is a difference between Unit Funds, which are managed by the unit and the FRG

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Funds, which are managed by the Family Readiness Group. The military cannot dictate how FRG funds are spent.

- In many cases, the FRG fund is considered an informal fund. (\*\*You can only have \$1000.00 in the fund at any time.)
- Exception: you can raise funds in excess of \$1000.00 to cover a specific event. The day after the event, there must be only \$1000.00 or less in the FRG account. See page 6 of unit treasurers' handbook for sample.
- The role of the FRG is NOT to loan money to individuals or groups.

### **TIPS:**

- If you have questions about handling of funds - **ASK** the Commander, unit POC, unit family Readiness officer or the Arizona National Guard Family Readiness Program Office can assist you.
- The FRG treasurer is the custodian of funds and is liable for any loss or misuse.
- Develop a spending plan and guidelines for expenditures. Standardize procedures. Be Consistent. Decide what mementos will be given and ensure all receive the same.
- Include FRG members in all spending decisions.
- Designate the amount of the FRG fund that leadership can spend without consulting the membership.
- Require more than one signature on checks as a check and balance system.
- Set up and maintain a ledger to closely track receipts and expenditures.
- Consider opening a non-interest checking account.
- **KEEP RECEIPTS!!!**

**Uses of FRG Funds:** Funds usage must benefit the entire group, not just individuals. Appropriate uses include, but are not limited to:

- Meeting Refreshments
- Deployment farewells



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- Welcome home activities
- Childcare fee during FRG meetings
- Postage and operating supplies in support of FRG
- Special activities designed to foster family involvement and preventing isolation
- FRG volunteer training

#### **Sources of Funds:**

- Fund Raising
- Commercial Sponsorship
- Donations and gifts

The State Family Readiness Coordinator may authorize either Appropriated Funds (AFP) or Non-appropriated Funds (NAF) for training of official volunteers. Appropriated and Nonappropriated funds can be used to cover enrollment, expenses, travel, and per diem (meals and lodging). Following a trip, submit a travel voucher to the organization who issued you travel orders. Be sure to attach receipts and submit promptly.

Normally, fundraisers are locally approved. CAUTION: GAMBLING IS ILLEGAL IN MANY STATES AND RAFFLES ARE CONSIDERED GAMBLING.

NOTE: For more information on funds, refer to Department of Army Pamphlet (DA PAM 608-47, Paragraph 3-7, page 7.

### **Family Readiness Group Childcare**

The provision of childcare is one of the factors in the success of your FRG. Research local policy on funding of FRG childcare. Some childcare options include, but are not limited to:

- Parent Co-op
- Certified baby sitters (i.e. American Red Cross)
- State Family Readiness Program maintains a Non-Appropriated Fund to reimburse child care providers. It is only \$2.00 an hour per child but does offer some compensation.

### **Family Readiness Group Activities**

***“If everyone is thinking alike, then someone isn’t thinking”***

***General George S. Patton***

During the active phase (period of time when all or part of the unit is preparing for deployment/mobilization), you will find increased participation in your FRG. During the sustainment phase (period of time when the soldier/airman is at their home station), the family members may have less need to interact with their FRG.

The following are suggested activities in Readiness of the active and sustainment phases of an FRG.

**ACTIVE:**

- Family Information Sheets, (See Appendix B) Telephone Tree updates.
- Pre-deployment/Deployment briefing participation
- Information updates
- Holiday parties
- Care package assembly
- Personal development workshops (i.e. Stress Management, Time Management, Coping with Separation, children’s issues during deployment, children’s workshops, etc.)
- Homecoming and reunion training
- Welcome activities
- Volunteer training and recognition

**VOLUNTEER PERKS:**

- Annual /recognition
- Birthday and get well cards
- Volunteer luncheon
- Membership in agency
- Holiday party
- Candy kisses in a basket
- Volunteer of the month
- Pictures
- Videos
- Buttons
- Top banana award
- Note pads- “Noteworthy Achievements”
- Rolls – “You’re on a roll”
- Cupcake – “You take the cake”
- Volunteer T-shirts
- Tote bag – “You deserve a break”
- Seeds – “Thanks for helping us grow”
- Administrator writes a letter of thanks
- Training Opportunities
- Bulletin board with news clips of volunteers
- Write thank you letters to volunteer’s family
- Write thank you letter to volunteer’s church
- Write thank you letter to volunteer’s employer
- Group picture for paper or newsletter
- Flowers for each volunteer

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- Cookout! Hats!
- Homemade cookies
- Pictures of volunteers in action
- Volunteer pins
- Volunteer portfolio-career development
- Coupon for lunch with program leader(s) to talk about anything
- Computer training
- Put up a volunteer suggestion box
- Post honor role in reception area
- 
- Give additional responsibility
- Send a valentine
- Written recommendation to prospective employee
- Nominate for volunteer awards in local community or at state, installation, or DOD level
- Permanent engraved nametag

**TAKE NOTE....** Use the following notes attached to the suggested items:

- “What a great idea!” to a Christmas bulb
- “You’re a Lifesaver!” to a roll of Lifesavers
- “Thanks for your hard work... I know it’s a headache!” to small aspirin packet
- “Sorry, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings!” to Band-Aid
- “You’ve given our project the sweet smell of success!” to potpourri or small sachet packet
- “A toast to a job well done!” to plastic wine glass full of jelly beans
- “You’re an angle here’s your halo” to 2 silver metallic pipe cleaners twisted together
- “Hugs and Kisses” to Hershey’s Hugs and Kisses
- “A noteworthy accomplishment!” to notepads
- “A cracker jack idea!” to a box of

**Cracker Jacks**

- “Don’t worry, it will be fine” or “You’re a doll” to a box of worry dolls or one doll on a card
- Invite to staff meetings
- “I’m lucky to have you help.” To a rabbit’s foot
- “You’re the apple of my eye” to a real or fake apple tied with a bow
- “I’ll stick with you” to a stick of gum
- “You take the cake” to cupcakes
- “Prescription-pep pills for tough jobs, cheer up pills, etc.” to M&M’s in an old medicine bottle
- “Let me know when I can come out” to a construction paper dog house.
- “My hats off to you” to party hats
- “Many motivated volunteers!” M&M’s = marvelous and motivated
- “Let’s celebrate!” to party whistles
- “You’re great work has me wreathed in smiles!” to small grape vine wreath
- “I’ll help you “see” this project through!” funny gag glasses
- “Thanks for raising the tough questions” mini box of raisins
- “Your ideas are so exciting I could just pop” balloon
- “I know your feeling snowed under right now” an inexpensive snow globe
- “No one holds a candle to you” scented votive or a pack of birthday candles
- “You did a bang-up job!” small box of sparklers



**SUSTAINMENT:**

- Adopt a local charity (i.e. orphanage, hospital, nursing home, shelter, school, etc.)
- Holiday parties
- Fun runs
- Marriage enrichment sessions
- Dining facility family night
- Co-ed sports activities

**Family Readiness Group Tips for Avoiding Burnout**

- Update Family Information Sheets (See Appendix B) and test telephone trees
- Volunteer training and recognition
- **“Nothing is interesting if you’re not interested.” Helen Macinness**
- Stop and take a breath
- Evaluate what you are doing and set priorities
- Take care of self and families first
- Consider phone answering machines
- Don’t try to be “all to all”
- Mutual Readiness goes both ways - ASK FOR HELP!!!!
- Look for your own support - friends, family, church
- Don’t overextend yourself
- Know your limits
- Make sure you eat and sleep as regularly as possible
- Stick to caring and let the Army/Air Force do its part in delivering specific services
- Dysfunctional families will devour you - REFER TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
- Understand and stick to the role assigned to you

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- Learn resources for referring problems and following through
- Don't judge yourself by numbers
- Don't measure success in "Thank You's"
- Don't compare your group to others - it's not competition
- Use senior and experienced spouses - they've been where you are now
- Learn to Delegate
- **DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL - USE THE SYSTEM IN PLACE!!!!**
- **BE YOURSELF!!!**